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Eyes Of A Dyke

Vivienne West

"She's one, you know," Anne said, not entirely pleasantly.

"Yeah, it shows. You know, in two years she's never once worn a skirt?"

"And she walks so heavy. Not like a woman at all."

"You got to admit she takes care of her face, though."

"Yeah, but in that job you have to."

"You never know, she might be straight," I said, joining the conversation for the first time. They both turned looks of disbelief at me. "Maybe, for all you know, I might be gay," I added, to reinforce the point. They relaxed and laughed. I was wearing a peasant skirt and embroidered blouse.

The conversation turned to other things. Just before the tea break I went to the ladies. There was no one there. Washing my hands under the tepid water ruminatively, I looked at my reflection in the dirty mirror. Did that look like the face of a lesbian? Round, soft features framed by wavy, long hair that was always untidy and looked rather good untidy. A neck with a string of jade beads around it, a neck white and soft. I returned to my desk.

One of the managers was leaving the room just as I got back. "He asked if we knew what you were doing over the weekend," Sandy informed me. "If you ask me, I think he fancies you."

"He's all right," said Anne. "Wish he'd ask after me, that's all. Will you talk to him?"

"I don't see why," I replied evenly.

"Oh! Got a new boyfriend?"

"No," I smiled. "But that doesn't mean I'm looking, either."

"Sure." They both smiled in disbelief.

When I let myself in, the house smelt faintly of incense. Bounder, the over-enthusiastic Labrador cross we had inherited from the last tenants, was not around, nor was Yvonne. They must have been at the park. I put the shopping down on the floor, put on the kettle, lit another joss-stick and made tea, watching the thin stream of smoke curl up towards the ceiling in the faint arabesques of a strange language.

Later, the shopping still waiting to be put away, I listened to the sounds of the bouncy dog and the front door opening. He greeted me wetly, jumping all over me and the chair I was occupying. Yvonne greeted me casually, brushing cool lips lightly across my forehead. "Hungry?"

"Not really."

"Okay."

(How do you say I love you without using words? How do you convey the ache in the belly without moaning?)

I went to bed early, listening to the silent sounds of Yvonne working at her books in the next room. Every so often a muttered curse, or the clatter of a dropped pencil. Bounder, I knew, lay over her feet under the table. I drifted over and around the edge of sleep.

I didn't notice her come into the room and undress, but I roused slightly and moved towards her as she slipped into the bed. "Sssh," she soothed, stroking my arm gently. "Go back to sleep."

"You know what they were talking about," I muttered through the incoherence of sleep, my lips feeling thick. "Dykes." I relished the word: I knew she hated it. "They were talking about dykes. They think I'm straight." I could feel a hysterical giggle rising in me, but I didn't have the energy to let it out. Instead I drifted back to sleep, not knowing or caring if Yvonne had understood me.

In the morning I stood naked in front of the bathroom mirror brushing my teeth as she showered. She was singing under her breath, splashing the moldy walls with soapy water as she washed. I gargled and spat, and searched my eyes closely, deep blue eyes with startling white lines running from the pupils to the very edges of the irises. The eyes of a dyke.

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